CANUCK LAW
Reporting That You're Not Getting Elsewhere (Do Your Own Research To Verify)

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Getting Started With Your Own Freedom Of Information/Access To Information Requests

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This article is going to be different. Instead of dropping a bunch of research, today we will get into conducting your own research. Specifically, how to go about filing freedom of information (or access to information) requests. FOI/ATI are essentially the same thing, a request for documents.

You don’t have to be a journalist, reporter, or researcher to file these requests. Anyone who is curious or concerned with what’s going on, or if they have a personal issue, can file one.

Now, this is just general information of filing such requests, and how it works. Take this article as a starting place, rather than as some gospel.

Depending on the jurisdiction and/or information sought, there may or may not be a fee. Also, the fee can go up if the the search is overly broad. As a general guideline: Government bodies will typically give a person their own information for free, but may charge for general information. Also, they typically won't hand over ***SOMEONE ELSE'S*** private information without a signed waiver or agreement.

Depending on many factors, an FOI can take anywhere from a few days, to several months for a response. There's no one answer for how long you will wait. Now, what will the agency you file with do?

In short, a few different outcomes can happen:
(a) Government body discloses records being sought
(b) Government body ignores or delays the request
(c) Government body admits that it has no such records
(d) Government body admits having records, but refuses to release them, for some reason. More on that later.

All 4 outcomes have happened to FOI requests from here. The success rate at getting meaningful data has (anecdotally) been about 50%. That being said, these are still a valuable tool for truth seekers. If nothing else, these are quite easy to file.

A tip for making FOI requests: write it up in such a way that it's clear you are asking for records. You likely won't get a helpful response if this involves open ended questions. As an example:

Instead of: "Has anyone studied the physical or psychological consequences of forcing young children to wear masks?"

Try this: "I request records of any studies involving the physical or psychological effects of forcing young children to wear masks"

This may sound nitpicky and silly, but the wording does make a difference. If records are sought on a controversial topic, this could be used as an excuse to deny it, or at least delay it.

What kinds of documents can be requested?

- Records of meetings, minutes
- Names of people involved in a committee, study, or research
- Conflict of interest disclosures
- Studies or research conducted
- Amounts of money paid to people or groups
- Sources of funding
- Reports filed publicly

Now, this should be commonsense, but if you wish to post your findings, consider scrubbing — removing — your personal details beforehand. At a minimum, don't have your address splashed all over the internet, but even your name is important.

It's worth pointing out that filing a formal FOI request may not always be necessary. Sometimes, if the information is already posted (or easy to find), just calling or emailing the Ministry or group in question may be enough to get it sent to you.

Also, if you don't want to pay fees, or just don't want to wait for a formal reply, see if someone has already made a similar request. In some jurisdictions, FOI results get posted online, in order to avoid duplication. If you do find what you want (from someone else), use that data. If you're going to publish it, go ahead. Now, their personal info shouldn't be disclosed, however, if it is, removing it would be appreciated. Their earlier work did you a favour after all.

- Section 12: Cabinet confidences
- Section 13: Advice or recommendations
- Section 14: Legal advice
- Section 15: Harm to law enforcement
- Section 16: Harm to intergovernmental relations or negotiations
- Section 17: Harm to financial or economic interests of a public body
- Section 18: Harm to conservation of heritage sites
- Section 19: Harm to individual or public safety
- Section 20: Information to be published or released within 60 days
- Section 21: Harm to business interests of a third party
- Section 22: Harm to personal privacy
- Section 22.1: Information relating to abortion services

It's worth mentioning that Governments can (and often do) either refuse to release records, or redact parts of it. Using the BC FOIPP Act as an example, many items have exclusions (at least partially). Now, just because it's a reason stated, doesn't mean it's legitimate.

When you get the results of the FOI request back, this might not be the end. There will almost always be some wording at the bottom saying that you can appeal, or request a review. Take this opportunity — especially if you've paid money or waited a long time — and ask for clarification on anything not understood.

As a closing thought, any readers who get something worthwhile are always welcome to submit their findings to Canuck Law. Results will be posted, with personal info removed.

P.S. Go check out Fluoride Free Peel for an extreme case on how to use FOIs to disprove a scam sprung onto the public.

ALBERTA
(a) Contact FOIP TO See If Records Already Available
(b) Service Alberta: Making A FOIP Request
(c) Alberts eServices: Make FOIP Request
(d) Freedom Of Information & Privacy Protection Act

BRITISH COLUMBIA
(a) Previously Released FOI Responses
(b) Getting Started With FOI Requests
(c) Submit General FOI Request
(d) Freedom Of Information & Protection Of Privacy Act

MANITOBA
(a) Listings Of Previously Received FOI Requests
(b) Freedom Of Information Main Portal
(c) Freedom Of Information & Privacy Protection Act

NEW BRUNSWICK
(a) Getting Started Searching For Information
(b) List Of Bodies Subject To FOI Requests
(c) Right To Information & Protection Of Privacy Act

NEWFOUNDLAND

(a) Previously Released ATIPP Results

(b) Filing Your Own Access To Information Requests

(c) ATIPP Coordinators

(d) Access To Information & Protection Of Privacy Act

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

(a) ATIPP Reviews Posted

(b) ATIPP Main Page

(c) Access To Information request Forms

(d) Access To Information And Protection Act

NOVA SCOTIA

(a) Searching Previously Disclosed Access To Information Results

(b) Getting Started With Access To Information

(c) Guidelines For FOI And Privacy Requests

(d) Freedom Of Information & Protection Of Privacy Act

NUNAVIT

(a) How To Place ATIPP Request

ONTARIO

(a) Directory Of Records

(b) Access To Information Forms

(c) Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Provincial

(d) Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Municial

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

(a) Making A Request Under FOIPP

(b) List Of Public Bodies Covered Under Act

(c) Freedom Of Information & Protection Of Privacy Act

QUEBEC

(a) Previous ATIPP Disclosures — French Only

(b) How To Make An Access Request

(c) General Information On ATIPP

(d) Act Respecting Access to Documents Held By Public Bodies

SASKATCHEWAN

(a) Access To Information — Provincial And Municipal Acts

YUKON

(a) Searching Archives Of ATIPP Requests

(b) Access to Information Registry

(c) ATIPP Request For Access To Information

(d) ATIPP Coordinators

FEDERAL

(a) Search Existing Access To Information Requests

(b) Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) Online Request

(c) Complete List Of Institutions

(d) List Of ATIP Coordinators

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